11

BREAD LABOUR

[THE GOSPEL OF WORK]

BY

M. K. GANDHI

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By
M. K. GANDHI

Compiled by
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NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
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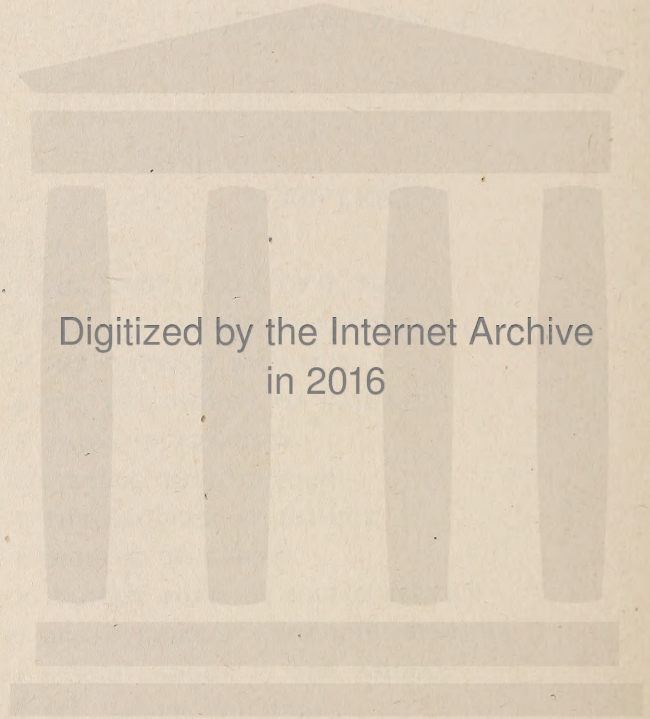
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CHAPTER 1

THE MAGIC SPELL OF A BOOK

[In a chapter of his *Autobiography* entitled "The Magic Spell of a Book" Gandhiji tells his readers how he was profoundly influenced by Ruskin's book *Unto This Last*, a copy of which was given to him by Mr. H. S. L. Polak, his co-worker in South Africa, to read during his journey from Johannesburg to Durban in 1904.]

The book was impossible to lay aside, once I had begun it. It gripped me. Johannesburg to Durban was a twenty-four hours' journey. I could not get any sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book. This was the first book of Ruskin I had ever read. During the days of my education, I had read practically nothing outside text-books, and after I launched into active life I had very little time for reading. I cannot therefore claim much book knowledge. However, I believe I have not lost much because of this enforced restraint. On the contrary, the limited reading may be said to have enabled me thoroughly to digest what I did read. Of these books, the one that brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in my life was *Unto This Last*.

I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin,

and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life. A poet is one who can call forth the good latent in the human breast. Poets do not influence all alike, for everyone is not evolved in an equal measure.

The teachings of *Unto This Last* I understood to be:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.

2. That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.

3. That a life of labour, i.e. the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realized. The third had never occurred to me. *Unto This Last* made it as clear as daylight for me that the second and the third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice.

An Autobiography, pp. 220-21, Edn. 1958

CHAPTER 2

THE LAW OF BREAD LABOUR

The law, that to live man must work, first came home to me upon reading Tolstoy's writing on Bread labour. But even before that I had begun to pay homage to it after reading Ruskin's *Unto This Last.* The divine law, that man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hands, was first stressed by a Russian writer named T. M. Bondaref. Tolstoy advertised it and gave it wider publicity. In my view the same principle has been set forth in the third chapter of the Gita, where we are told, that he who eats without offering sacrifice eats stolen food. Sacrifice here can only mean Bread labour.

Reason too leads us to an identical conclusion. How can a man, who does not do body labour, have the right to eat? 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread', says the Bible. A millionaire cannot carry on for long, and will soon get tired of his life, if he rolls in his bed all day long, and is even helped to his food. He, therefore, induces hunger by exercise and helps himself to the food he eats. If everyone, whether rich or poor, has thus to take exercise in some shape or form why should it not assume the form of productive, i.e. Bread labour? No one asks the cultivator to take breathing exercise or to work his muscles. And more than nine-tenths of humanity lives by tilling the soil. How much happier, healthier and more peaceful would the world become,

if the remaining tenth followed the example of the overwhelming majority at least to the extent of labouring enough for their food! And many hardships, connected with agriculture, would be easily redressed, if such people took a hand in it. Again invidious distinctions of rank would be abolished, when everyone without exception acknowledged the obligation of Bread labour. It is common to all the *varnas*. There is a worldwide conflict between capital and labour, and the poor envy the rich. If all worked for their bread, distinctions of rank would be obliterated; the rich would still be there, but they would deem themselves only trustees of their property, and would use it mainly in the public interest.

Bread labour is a veritable blessing to one who would observe Non-violence, worship Truth, and make the observance of *brahmacharya* a natural act. This labour can truly be related to agriculture alone. But at present at any rate, everybody is not in a position to take to it. A person can therefore spin or weave, or take up carpentry or smithery, instead of tilling the soil, always regarding agriculture however to be the ideal. Everyone must be his own scavenger. Evacuation is as necessary as eating; and the best thing would be for everyone to dispose of his own waste. If this is impossible, each family should see to its scavenging. I have felt for years, that there must be something radically wrong, where scavenging has been made the concern of a separate class in society. We have no historical record of the man, who first assigned the lowest status to this essential

sanitary service. Whoever he was, he by no means did us a good. We should, from our very childhood, have the idea impressed upon our minds that we are all scavengers, and the easiest way of doing so is, for everyone who has realized this, to commence Bread labour as a scavenger. Scavenging, thus intelligently taken up, will help one to a true appreciation of the equality of man.

From Yeravda Mandir, pp. 35-37, Edn. 1957

CHAPTER 3

THE DUTY OF SACRIFICE

Referring to the Russian writer Bondaref, Tolstoy observes that his discovery of the vital importance of Bread labour is one of the most remarkable discoveries of modern times. The idea is that every healthy individual must labour enough for his food and his intellectual faculties must be exercised not in order to obtain a living or amass a fortune but only in the service of mankind. If this principle is observed everywhere, all men would be equal, none would starve and the world would be saved from many a sin.

It is possible that this golden rule will never be observed by the whole world. Millions observe it in spite of themselves without understanding it. But their mind is working in a contrary direction, so that they are unhappy themselves and their labour is not as fruitful as it should be. This state of things serves

as an incentive to those who understand and seek to practise the rule. By rendering a willing obedience to it they enjoy good health as well as perfect peace and develop their capacity for service.

Ashram Observances in Action, pp. 60-61, Edn. 1955

[I] venture to suggest that in the verses 12 and 13 of chapter III (in the Gita) the word *yajna* is capable of only one meaning. The fourteenth verse makes it absolutely clear which means:

> "By food the living live; food comes of rain,
> And rain comes by the pious sacrifice,
> And sacrifice is paid with tithes of toil."
>
> —Arnold

Here, therefore, there is not only the theory, in my opinion, of bodily labour propounded, but there is also the theory established of labour not only for oneself but for others, when and when only it becomes *yajna* or sacrifice. The rains come not through intellectual feats but through sheer bodily labour. It is a well-established scientific fact that where forests are denuded of trees rains cease, where trees are planted rains are attracted and the volume of water received increases with the increase of vegetation. Laws of nature are still unexplored. We have but scratched the surface. Who knows all the ill effects, moral and physical, of the cessation of bodily labour?

Young India, 15-10-1925, p. 355

"Brahma created his people with the duty of sacrifice laid upon them and said, 'By this do you flourish. Let it be the fulfiller of all your desires.' He who eats without performing this sacrifice eats

stolen bread," thus says the Gita. Sacrifices may be of many kinds. One of them may well be Bread labour. If all laboured for their bread and no more, then there would be enough food and enough leisure for all. Then there would be no cry of over-population, no disease and no such misery as we see around. Such labour will be the highest form of sacrifice. Men will no doubt do many other things either through their bodies or through their minds, but all this will be labour of love, for the common good. There will then be no rich and no poor, none high and none low, no touchable and no untouchable.

This may be an unattainable ideal. But we need not, therefore, cease to strive for it. Even if without fulfilling the whole law of sacrifice, that is, the law of our being, we performed physical labour enough for our daily bread, we should go a long way towards the ideal.

If we did so, our wants would be minimized, our food will be simple. We should then eat to live, not live to eat. Let anyone who doubts the accuracy of this proposition try to sweat for his bread, he will derive the greatest relish from the productions of his labour, improve his health and discover that many things he took, were superfluities.

Harijan, 29-6-1935, p. 156

CHAPTER 4

THE PHILOSOPHY OF YAJNA

Yajna means an act directed to the welfare of others, done without desiring any return for it, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. 'Act' here must be taken in its widest sense, and includes thought and word, as well as deed. 'Others' embraces not only humanity, but all life.

Again a primary sacrifice must be an act, which conduces the most to the welfare of the greatest number in the widest area, and which can be performed by the largest number of men and women with the least trouble. It will not therefore, be a *yajna*, much less a *mahayajna*, to wish or to do ill to anyone else, even in order to serve a so-called higher interest. And the Gita teaches and experience testifies, that all action that cannot come under the category of *yajna* promotes bondage.

The world cannot subsist for a single moment without *yajna* in this sense, and therefore the Gita, after having dealt with true wisdom in the second chapter, takes up in the third the means of attaining it, and declares in so many words, that *yajna* came with the Creation itself. This body, therefore, has been given us, only in order that we may serve all Creation with it. And therefore, says the Gita, he who eats without offering *yajna* eats stolen food. Every single act of one who would lead a life of purity should be in the nature of *yajna*.

Yajna having come to us with our birth, we are debtors all our lives, and thus for ever bound to serve the universe. And even as a bondslave receives food, clothing and so on from the master whom he serves, so should we gratefully accept such gifts as may be assigned to us by the Lord of the universe. What we receive must be called a gift; for as debtors we are entitled to no consideration for the discharge of our obligations. Therefore, we may not blame the Master, if we fail to get it. Our body is His to be cherished or cast away according to His will.

This is not a matter for complaint or even pity; on the contrary, it is a natural and even a pleasant and desirable state, if only we realize our proper place in God's scheme. We do indeed need strong faith, if we would experience this supreme bliss. "Do not worry in the least about yourself, leave all worry to God," this appears to be the commandment in all religions.

This need not frighten anyone. He who devotes himself to service with a clear conscience will day by day grasp the necessity for it in greater measure, and will continually grow richer in faith. The path of service can hardly be trodden by one, who is not prepared to renounce self-interest, and to recognize the conditions of his birth. Consciously or unconsciously everyone of us does render some service or other. If we cultivate the habit of doing this service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow stronger, and will make not only for our own happiness, but that of the world at large.

From Yeravda Mandir, pp. 53-56, Edn. 1957

CHAPTER 5

YAJNA IN PRACTICE

Yajna is duty to be performed, or service to be rendered, all the twenty-four hours of the day. To serve without desire is to favour not others, but ourselves, even as in discharging a debt we serve only ourselves, lighten our burden and fulfil our duty. Again, not only the good, but all of us are bound to place our resources at the disposal of humanity. And if such is the law, as evidently it is, indulgence ceases to hold a place in life and gives way to renunciation. The duty of renunciation differentiates mankind from the beast.

But renunciation here does not mean abandoning the world and retiring into the forest. The spirit of renunciation should rule all the activities of life. A house holder does not cease to be one, if he regards life as a duty rather than as an indulgence. A merchant, who operates in the sacrificial spirit, will have crores passing through his hands, but he will, if he follows the law, use his abilities for service. He will, therefore, not cheat or speculate, will lead a simple life, will not injure a living soul and will lose millions rather than harm anybody. Let no one run away with the idea that this type of merchant exists only in my imagination. Fortunately for the world, it does exist in the West as well as in the East. It is true, such merchants may be counted on one's fingers' ends, but the type ceases to be imaginary, as soon as even one living specimen can be found to answer to it. And if we go deeply into the matter, we shall

come across men in every walk of life who lead dedicated lives. No doubt these sacrificers obtain their livelihood by their work. But livelihood is not their objective, but only a by-product of their vocation.

A life of sacrifice is the pinnacle of art, and is full of true joy. *Yajna* is not *yajna* if one feels it to be burdensome or annoying. Self-indulgence leads to destruction, and renunciation to immorality. Joy has no independent existence. It depends upon our attitude of life. One man will enjoy theatrical scenery, another the ever new scenes which unfold themselves in the sky. Joy, therefore, is a matter of individual and national education. We shall delight in things which we have been taught to delight in as children. And illustrations can be easily cited of different national tastes.

Again, many sacrificers imagine that they are free to receive from the people everything they need, and many things they do not need, because they are rendering disinterested service. Directly this idea sways a man, he ceases to be a servant, and becomes a tyrant over the people.

One who would serve will not waste a thought upon his own comforts, which he leaves to be attended to or neglected by his Master on high. He will not, therefore, encumber himself with everything that comes his way; he will take only what he strictly needs and leave the rest. He will be calm, free from anger and unruffled in mind even if he finds himself inconvenienced. His service, like virtue, is its own reward, and he will rest content with it.

Again, one dare not be negligent in service, or be behindhand with it. He, who thinks that he must be diligent only in his personal business, and unpaid public business may be done in any way and at any time he chooses, has still to learn the very rudiments of the science of sacrifice. Voluntary service of others demands the best of which one is capable, and must take precedence over service of self. In fact, the pure devotee consecrates himself to the service of humanity without any reservation whatever.

From Yeravda Mandir, pp. 57-60, Edn. 1957

Q.: What is your view on what Tolstoy calls 'Bread labour'? Do you really earn your living by your bodily labour?

A.: Strictly speaking Bread labour is not a word of Tolstoy's coining. He took it from another Russian writer Bondaref, and it means that everyone is expected to perform sufficient body labour in order to entitle him to it. It is not therefore necessary to earn one's living by Bread labour, taking the word living in its broader sense. But everyone must perform some useful body labour. For me at the present moment spinning is the only body labour I give. It is a mere symbol. I do not give enough body labour. That is also one of the reasons why I consider myself as living upon charity. But I also believe that such men will have to be found in every nation who will give themselves body, soul and mind to it and for their sustenance throw themselves on the mercy of their fellowmen, that is, on God.

Young India, 5-11-1925, p. 378

CHAPTER 6

INTELLECTUAL LABOUR

May not men earn their bread by intellectual labour? No. The needs of the body must be supplied by the body. "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's" perhaps applies here well.

Mere mental, that is, intellectual labour is for the soul and is its own satisfaction. It should never demand payment. In the ideal State, doctors, lawyers and the like will work solely for the benefit of society, not for self. Obedience to the law of Bread labour will bring about a silent revolution in the structure of society. Man's triumph will consist in substituting the struggle for existence by the struggle for mutual service. The law of the brute will be replaced by the law of man.

Harijan, 29-6-1935, p. 156

Let me not be misunderstood. I do not discount the value of intellectual labour, but no amount of it is any compensation for bodily labour which everyone of us is born to give for the common good of all. It may be, often is, infinitely superior to bodily labour, but it never is or can be a substitute for it, even as intellectual food though far superior to the grains we eat never can be a substitute for them. Indeed without the products of the earth, those of the intellect would be an impossibility.

Young India, 15-10-1925, pp. 355-56

Q.: Why should we insist on a Rabindranath or Raman earning his bread by manual labour? Is it not sheer wastage? Why should not brain workers be considered on a par with manual workers, for both of them perform useful social work?

A.: Intellectual work is important and has an undoubted place in the scheme of life. But what I insist on is the necessity of physical labour. No man, I claim, ought to be free from that obligation. It will serve to improve even the quality of his intellectual output. I venture to say that in ancient times, Brahmans worked with their body as with their mind. But even if they did not, body labour was a proved necessity at the present time. In this connection I would refer to the life of Tolstoy and how he made famous the theory of Bread labour, first propounded in his country by the Russian peasant Bondaref.

Harijan, 23-2-1947, p. 36

"Work and culture cannot be separated?"

"No. They tried to do it in ancient Rome and failed miserably. Culture without labour, or culture which is not the fruit of labour would be 'Vomitoria' as a Roman Catholic writer says. The Romans made indulgence a habit, and were ruined. Man cannot develop his mind by simply writing and reading or making speeches all day long. All my reading I tell you was done in the leisure hours I got in jails, and I have benefited by it because all of it was done not desultorily but for some purpose. And though I have worked physically for days and months for eight hours on end I don't think I suffered from mental

decay. I have often walked as much as 40 miles a day and yet never felt dull."

"But you had this mental equipment."

"No fear. You don't know how mediocre I was at school and in England. I had never the courage to speak at debating society meetings or even in a gathering of vegetarians. No. Don't you run away with the thought that I was blessed with any extraordinary powers. God, I think, advisedly did not give me then the power to speak. You must know, among us, I am the least read man."

Harijan, 1-8-1936, p. 195

A visitor asked Gandhiji if he was not putting too much emphasis on the gospel of work, if not making a kind of fetish of work. Gandhiji replied: "Not at all. I have always meant what I said. There can never be too much emphasis placed on work. I am simply repeating the gospel taught by the Gita, where the Lord says: 'If I did not remain ever at work sleeplessly I should set a wrong example to mankind.' Did I not appeal to the professional men to turn the wheel to set an example to the rest of our countrymen?"

"Would you do the same thing with say one like Lord Buddha?"

"Yes; without the slightest hesitation."

"Then what would you say about great saints like Tukaram and Dnyanadev?"

"Who am I to judge them?"

"But you would judge Buddha?"

"I never said so. I simply said, if I had the good fortune to be face to face with one like him, I should

not hesitate to ask him why he did not teach the gospel of work, in preference to one of contemplation. I should do the same thing if I were to meet these saints."

Harijan, 2-11-1935, p. 298

CHAPTER 7

THE PROBLEM OF LEISURE

A friend asked Gandhiji: "You do not seem to have regard to the question of leisure. Too much work leaves little leisure to the poorer classes for any intellectual thinking and recreation, and you are now seeking to make them work more."

"Is that really so? I am trying to deal with people who do not know what to do with their enforced leisure. It is their enforced idleness that has made them like so many lifeless stones. There is such inertia that some of them do not want to be disturbed."

"You will certainly give employment where it is needed. But are you not putting an excessive emphasis on dull monotonous work when you ask them to grind their own corn and husk their own rice?"

"It is no more monotonous than the idle hours hanging heavy on their hands, and it will cease to be monotonous when they realize that they not only earn a few coppers but preserve their own health and that of their countrymen. It is certainly not more monotonous than working away in modern factories. Any work, however humdrum, which does not take

away the joy of creating something, is not monotonous. You go to a huge shoemaking factory. Some people would be engaged in making soles, some in making the uppers, some in doing other parts. This is monotonous, for, they work without intelligence, but there is no monotony about the work of the shoemaker who makes the whole shoe himself. His work will bear the impress of his skill, and he will have the joy of having created something himself. No, almost everything depends on the spirit in which a thing is done. I would not mind being my own drawer of water and hewer of wood, provided I am doing the work intelligently and not because some one compels me to do so. All labour when done intelligently and to some high purpose becomes at once re-creation and recreation."

"Pardon me, but when you insist on pure and simple physical work, all day long, don't you run the risk of making them intellectually dull? How many hours of physical work you think are necessary?"

"I would not mind working eight hours myself."

"I do not mean yourself. You have enough intellectual energy and creative talent to fill the rest of your hours. Yours should be regarded as an exceptional case. I know you can derive joy from eight hours' spinning."

"No. I want everyone to derive joy out of eight hours' work. Everything depends on the spirit in which work is done and an eight hours' day of honest,

clean labour leaves one enough time for intellectual pursuits. My object is to put an end to inertia and lethargy, and I would be immensely satisfied when I tell the world that every villager of India is earning Rs. 20 a month by the sweat of his brow."

Harijan, 8-3-1935, pp. 31-32

I gave some time ago in these columns Mr. L. P. Jacks' definition on leisure: "That part of a man's life where the struggle between white angels and black for the possession of his soul goes on with the greatest intensity," and tried to show, from the statistics he had given, how difficult is the science and art of leisure. Mr. Bertrand Russell who is keen on ensuring every citizen ample leisure would reduce the working hours to four per day. But an esteemed friend talking to Gandhiji the other day wondered if the problem of leisure was really so difficult. "Why do you insist on eight hours' manual work a day?" he asked. "Is it not possible in a well ordered society to reduce the working day to two hours and leave the citizen ample leisure for intellectual and artistic pursuits?"

"We know that those who get all that leisure—both the working and the intellectual classes—do not make the best use of it. In fact we too often find the idle mind being turned into the Devil's workshop."

"No; he would not be idling away. Supposing we divided the day into two hours' physical labour and six hours' intellectual labour; would it not be good for the nation?"

"I do not know that it would be feasible. I have not mathematically calculated it, but if a man will do the intellectual labour, only for profit and not for the nation, I am sure that the scheme will break down; unless of course the State pays him amply for the two hours' labour and compels him to do other work without paying him anything. That would be a fine thing, but it cannot be done without a kind of State conscription."

"But take for instance you. You cannot in the nature of things do eight hours' physical labour, and have to do eight hours' or more intellectual work. You do not abuse your leisure?"

"It is compulsory work and leaves no leisure, as for instance it would if I was going out to play tennis. But I tell you even taking my case, that I am sure our minds would have been infinitely better if we laboured with our hands for eight hours. We would not have a single idle thought and I may tell you that my mind is not entirely free from idle thoughts. Even now I am what I am, because I realized the value of physical labour at a very early stage of my life."

"But then if physical work has such inherent virtue, our people have been working more than eight hours a day, not with any appreciable effect on the purity or strength of their minds."

"Physical labour by itself is not an education even as mental labour is not. It has been with our people deadly drudgery without their knowing this, and that deadens one's finer instincts. That is where I have my strongest complaint against the *savarna*

Hindus. They have rendered work for the proletariat a task of hard drudgery, from which they have no pleasure and in which they have no interest. If they had been considered members of the society enjoying the same status as they, theirs would have been the proudest position in life. This is supposed to be the Kaliyuga. In the Satyayuga or Golden Age, whenever it was, the society, I dare say, was better ordered than today. Ours is an ancient land where civilizations have come and gone, and it is difficult to say what exactly we were like at a particular age. But there is no doubt that we are where we are because we have long neglected the Shoodras. Today's village culture, if culture it can be called, is an awful culture. The villagers live as worse than animals. Nature compels animals to work and live naturally. We have so debased our working classes that they cannot work and live naturally. If our people had laboured intelligently and with joy, we should have been quite different today."

[From the Article "Weekly Letter" by M. D.]

Harijan, 1-8-1936, pp. 194-95

CHAPTER 8

DIGNITY OF LABOUR

You may ask: "Why should we use our hands?" and say "the manual work has got to be done by those who are illiterate. I can only occupy myself with reading literature and political essays." I think we have to realize the dignity of labour. If a barber or shoemaker attends a college, he ought not to abandon the profession of barber or shoemaker. I consider that a barber's profession is just as good as the profession of medicine.

Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, (Natesan), p. 389, Edn. 1933

I have indeed wept to see the stark poverty and unemployment in our country, but I must confess our own negligence and ignorance are largely responsible for it. We do not know the dignity of labour as such. Thus a shoemaker will not do anything beyond making his shoes, he will think that all other labour is below his dignity. That wrong notion must go. There is enough employment in India for all who will work with their hands and feet honestly. God has given everyone the capacity to work and earn more than his daily bread, and whoever is ready to use that capacity is sure to find work. No labour is too mean for one who wants to earn an honest penny. The only thing is the readiness to use the hands and feet that God has given us.

Harijan, 19-12-1936, p. 356

Divorce between intelligence and labour has resulted in criminal negligence of the villages. And so, instead of having graceful hamlets dotting the land, we have dung-heaps. The approach to many villages is not a refreshing experience. Often one would like to shut one's eyes and stuff one's nose; such is the surrounding dirt and offending smell. If the majority of Congressmen were derived from our villages as they should be, they should be able to make our villages models of cleanliness in every sense of the word. But they have never considered it their duty to identify themselves with the villagers in their daily lives. A sense of national or social sanitation is not a virtue among us. We may take a kind of a bath, but we do not mind dirtying the well or the tank or the river by whose side or in which we perform ablutions. I regard this defect as a great vice which is responsible for the disgraceful state of our villages and the sacred banks of the sacred rivers and for the diseases that spring from insanitation.

Constructive Programme, p. 15, Edn. 1948

Gandhiji referred to the complaints brought to him that the refugees, though provided with food, shelter and clothing, were averse to any work. If a man was in distress, the key to his happiness lay in labour. God did not create man to eat, drink and make merry. The Gita taught that one should perform *yajna* (Bread labour) and partake of the fruits of that labour. Millionaires who ate without work were parasites. Even they should eat by the sweat of their brow or should go without food. The

only permissible exception was the disabled for whom society provided. There was a variety of work for the refugees to do, such as maintaining sanitation including cleaning of latrines, spinning and other crafts. They should learn to make the best of the situation in which they found themselves.

Delhi Diary, p. 390, Edn. 1948

CHAPTER 9

HIGHEST FORM OF SOCIAL SERVICE

There seems to be some confusion about the principle of Bread labour. It is never opposed to social service. Intelligent Bread labour is any day the highest form of social service. For what can be better than that a man should by his personal labour add to the useful wealth of the country? 'Being' is 'doing'.

The adjective 'intelligent' has been prefixed to 'labour' in order to show that labour to be social service must have that definite purpose behind it. Otherwise every labourer can be said to render social service. He does in a way, but what is meant here is something much more than that. A person who labours for the general good of all serves society and is worthy of his hire. Therefore, such Bread labour is not different from social service. What the vast mass of mankind does for self or at best for family, a social servant does for general good.

Harijan, 1-6-1935, p. 125

Return to the villages means a definite, voluntary recognition of the duty of Bread labour and all it connotes. But says the critic, "Millions of India's children are today living in the villages and yet they are living a life of semi-starvation." This, alas, is but too true. Fortunately we know that theirs is not voluntary obedience. They would perhaps shirk body labour if they could, and even rush to the nearest city if they could be accommodated in it. Compulsory obedience to a master is a state of slavery, willing obedience to one's father is the glory of sonship. Similarly compulsory obedience to the law of Bread labour breeds poverty, disease and discontent. It is a state of slavery. Willing obedience to it must bring contentment and health. And it is health which is real wealth, not pieces of silver and gold.

Harijan, 29-6-1935, p. 156

If everybody lived by the sweat of his brow, the earth would become a paradise. The question of the use of special talents hardly needed separate consideration. If everyone laboured physically for his bread, it followed that poets, doctors, lawyers, etc., would regard it their duty to use those talents gratis for the service of humanity. Their output will be all the better and richer for their selfless devotion to duty.

Harijan, 2-3-1947, p. 47

God never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment, with the result that if anyone appropriates more than he really needs, he reduces his neighbour to destitution.

The starvation of people in several parts of the world is due to many of us seizing very much more than they need. We may utilize the gifts of nature just as we choose, but in her books the debits are always equal to the credits. There is no balance in either column.

This law is not invalidated by the fact that men raise bigger crops by mechanizing agriculture and using artificial fertilizers, and similarly increase the industrial output. This only means a transformation of natural energy. Try as we might, the balance is always nil.

Ashram Observances in Action, pp. 62-63, Edn. 1955

From the very beginning it has been my firm conviction that agriculture provides the only unfailing and perennial support to the people of this country. We should take it up and see how far we can go with it as basis. I would not at all mind if some of our young men serve the country by training themselves as experts in agriculture in the place of Khadi.

Khadi, Why and How, p. 173, Edn. 1959

CHAPTER 10

BREAD LABOUR WITH THE CHARKHA

Just as every one of us must eat and drink and clothe himself, even so every one of us must spin himself.

Young India, 28-5-1925, p. 182

The greatest industry which requires the intelligence of millions of hands is no doubt hand-spinning. What is needed is to give the vast agricultural population of this country an added and an intelligent occupation which will train both their brains and hands. It is the finest and cheapest education that can be devised for them. Cheapest because it is immediately remunerative. And if we want universal education in India, the primary education consists not in a knowledge of three R's but in a knowledge of hand-spinning and all it implies. And when through it the hand and the eye are properly trained, the boy or the girl is ready to receive instruction in the three R's. This I know would appear to some to be utterly absurd and to others to be totally unworkable. But those who so think do not know the condition of the millions. Nor do they know what it means to educate the millions of children of Indian peasantry. And this much-needed education cannot be given unless educated India which is responsible for the political awakening in the country will appreciate the dignity of labour and unless every young man would consider it his imperative duty to learn the art of hand-spinning and then reintroduce it in the villages.

Young India, 9-9-1926, p. 320

The more I penetrate the villages, the greater is the shock delivered as I perceive the blank stare in the eyes of the villagers I meet. Having nothing else to do but to work as labourers side by side with their bullocks, they have become almost like them. It is a tragedy of the first magnitude that millions have ceased to use their hands as hands. Nature is revenging herself upon us with terrible effect for this criminal waste of the gift she has bestowed upon us human beings. We refuse to make full use of the gift. And it is the exquisite mechanism of the hands that among a few other things separates us from the beast. Millions of us use them merely as feet. The result is that she starves both the body and the mind.

The spinning wheel alone can stop this reckless waste. It can do that now and without any extraordinary outlay of money or intelligence. Owing to this waste, we are living in a state almost of suspended animation. It can be revived if only every home is again turned into a spinning mill and every village into a weaving mill. With it will at once revive the ancient rustic art and the rustic song. A semi-starved nation can have neither religion nor art nor organization.

Young India, 17-2-1927, p. 52

The centre of the village worker's life will be the spinning wheel. The idea at the back of Khadi is that it is an industry supplementary to agriculture and co-extensive with it. The spinning wheel cannot be said to have been established in its own proper place

in our life, until we can banish idleness from our villages and make every village home a busy hive.

The worker will not only be spinning regularly but will be working for his bread with the adze or the spade or the last, as the case may be. All his hours minus the eight hours of sleep and rest will be fully occupied with some work. He will have no time to waste. He will allow himself no laziness and allow others none. His life will be a constant lesson to his neighbours in ceaseless and joy-giving industry. Our compulsory or voluntary idleness has to go. If it does not go, no panacea will be of any avail, and semi-starvation will remain the eternal problem that it is. He who eats two grains must produce four. Unless the law is accepted as universal, no amount of reduction in population would serve to solve the problem. If the law is accepted and observed, we have room enough to accommodate millions more to come.

The village worker will thus be a living embodiment of industry.

Harijan, 31-8-1934, p. 229

CHAPTER 11

BREAD LABOUR IN THE ASHRAM

Tolstoy made a deep impression on my mind, and even in South Africa I began to observe the rule to the best of my ability. And ever since the Ashram was founded, Bread labour has been perhaps its most characteristic feature.

For certain hours in the day, there is nothing to be done but work. Work is, therefore, bound to be put in. A worker may be lazy, inefficient or inattentive, but he works for a number of hours all the same. Again certain kinds of labour are capable of yielding an immediate product and the worker cannot idle away a considerable amount of his time. In an institution where body labour plays a prominent part, there are few servants. Drawing water, splitting firewood, cleaning and filling lamps with oil, sanitary service, sweeping the roads and houses, washing one's clothes, cooking, all these tasks must be performed without fail.

Besides this there are various activities carried on in the Ashram as a result of and in order to help fulfilment of the observances, such as agriculture, dairying, weaving, carpentry, tanning, etc. which must be attended to by many members of the Ashram.

All these activities may be deemed sufficient for keeping the observance of Bread labour, but another essential feature of *yajna* is the idea of serving others

and the Ashram will perhaps be found wanting from this latter standpoint. The Ashram ideal is to live to serve. In such an institution there is no room for idleness or shirking duty, and everything should be done with right goodwill. If this were actually the case, the Ashram ministry would have been more fruitful than it is. But we are still very far from such a happy condition. Therefore although in a sense every activity in the Ashram is of the nature of *yajna*, it is compulsory for all to spin for at least one hour in the name of God incarnated as the Poor (Daridranarayana).

People often say that in an institution like the Ashram where body labour is given pride of place, there is no scope for intellectual development, but my experience is just the reverse. Everyone who has been to the Ashram has made intellectual progress as well; I know of none who was the worse on account of a sojourn in the Ashram.

Intellectual development is often supposed to mean a knowledge of facts concerning the universe. I freely admit that such knowledge is not laboriously imparted to the students in the Ashram. But if intellectual progress spells understanding and discrimination, there is adequate provision for it in the Ashram. Where body labour is performed for mere wages, it is possible that the labourer becomes dull and listless. No one tells him how and why things are done; he himself has no curiosity and takes no interest in his work. But such is not the case in the Ashram. Everything including sanitary service must be done

intelligently, enthusiastically and for the love of God. Thus there is scope for intellectual development in all departments of Ashram activity. Everyone is encouraged to acquire full knowledge of his own subject. Anyone who neglects to do this must answer for it. Everyone in the Ashram is a labourer; none is a wage-slave.

It is a gross superstition to imagine that knowledge is acquired only through books. We must discard this error. Reading books has a place in life, but is useful only in its own place. If book-knowledge is cultivated at the cost of body labour, we must raise a revolt against it. Most of our time must be devoted to body labour, and only a little to reading. As in India today the rich and the so-called higher classes despise body labour, it is very necessary to insist on the dignity of labour. Even for real intellectual development one should engage in some useful bodily activity.

Ashram Observances in Action, pp. 61-66, Edn. 1955

CHAPTER 12

NO LABOUR, NO MEAL

My friendship for the paupers of India has made me hard-hearted enough to contemplate their utter starvation with equanimity in preference to their utter reduction to beggary. My Ahimsa would not tolerate the idea of giving a free meal to a healthy person who has not worked for it in some honest way, and if I had the power I would stop every *Sadavrat* where free meals are given. It has degraded the nation and has encouraged laziness, idleness, hypocrisy and even crime. Such misplaced charity adds nothing to the wealth of the country, whether material or spiritual, and gives a false sense of meritoriousness to the donor. How nice and wise it would be if the donor were to open institutions where they would give meals under healthy, clean surroundings to men and women who would work for them. I personally think that the spinning wheel or any of the processes that cotton has to go through will be an ideal occupation. But if they will not have that, they may choose any other work; only the rule should be, "No labour, no meal". Every city has its own difficult problem of beggars, a problem for which the moneyed men are responsible. I know that it is easier to fling free meals in the faces of idlers, but much more difficult to organize an institution where honest work has to be done before meals are served. From a pecuniary standpoint, in the initial stages at any rate, the

cost of feeding people after taking work from them will be more than the cost of the present free kitchens. But I am convinced that it will be cheaper in the long run, if we do not want to increase in geometrical progression the race of loafers which is fast overrunning this land.

Young India, 13-8-1925, p. 282

I do feel that whilst it is bad to encourage begging, I will not send away a beggar without offering him work and food. If he will not work, I should let him go without food. Those who are physically disabled like the halt and the maimed have got to be supported by the State. There is, however, a lot of fraud going on under cover of pretended blindness or even genuine blindness. So many blind have become rich because of ill-gotten gains. It would be a good thing if they were taken to an asylum, rather than be exposed to this temptation.

Harijan, 11-5-1935, p. 99

CHAPTER 13

DEPENDENCE ON SERVANTS

The institution of domestic servants is an old one. But the attitude of master towards servants has changed from time to time. Some regard servants as members of the family whereas the others look upon them as slaves or chattels. Between these two extreme views may be summed up the attitude of society in general towards servants. Nowadays servants are in great demand everywhere. They have become conscious of their value and naturally demand their own conditions of pay and service. This would be proper if it were invariably coupled with a proper understanding and performance of their duty. In that event they would cease to be servants and would earn for themselves the status of members of the family. The belief in the efficacy of violence is, however, in the air. How then can servants properly win the status of members of their masters' families? That is a question that may well be asked.

I hold that a man who desires the co-operation of and wishes to co-operate with others should not be dependent on servants. If anyone has to have one at a time of scarcity of servants, he will have to pay what is demanded and accept all other conditions with the result that he will, instead of being master, become the servant of his employee. This is good for neither the master nor the servant. But if what an individual

seeks is not slavery but the co-operation of a fellow-being he will not only serve himself but also him whose co-operation he needs. Through the extension of this principle a man's family will become coterminous with the world and his attitude towards his fellow-beings will also undergo a corresponding change. There is no other way of reaching the desired consummation.

He who wants to act on this principle will be content to start with small beginnings. In spite of a man's ability to command the co-operation of thousands he must have sufficient self-restraint and self-respect in him to enable him to stand alone. Such a person will never dream of looking on any person as his menial and try to keep him under subjugation. In fact he will forget altogether that he is master of his servants and will try his best to bring them to his level. In other words he should be content to do without what others cannot have.

Harijan, 10-3-1946, p. 40

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